

SAFFRON AND RAINBOW: ALLIES OR FOES?

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“Rainbow over Saffron”. How often we have read these lines in protests (yes JNU, I’m looking at you). But have we ever tried to analyse that does this line holds some ground or is it a mere political tool for some people who are trying to gain some brownie points? Well, the time has come to dive deep into facts and analyse what meaning this line actually beholds.



When we hear the word Saffron, the level of imagination varies from person to person. For left liberals it may ring bells of people dressed in *bhagwa* on bikes carrying triangular flags and shouting Jai Shree Ram. For right wing nationalists it brings up image of prosperous history and culture of India, while for some people it may conjure up the image of the ruling ‘Saffron Party’. Ever since the right-wing Hindu nationalist party BJP ascended the throne of India in 2014 it is accused of neglecting the LGBTQ community. And rightfully, especially after the statement of Rajya Sabha MP Subramanian Swamy that ‘Homosexuality is a genetic flaw like having six fingers’ adds up to the allegations.

So why I’m talking about BJP? Shouldn’t I be talking about Saffron in general? The answer lies in the fact that BJP finds itself at the centre of the conspiracy of maligning the image of Saffron, an auspicious colour for Hindus and Sikhs. If we take a look at how LGBT community is represented in

ancient Hindu scriptures, we will find that ancient India accepted them with open arms! No matter how crazy it may sound but we were among the first to acknowledge the presence LGBT community, way before the modern western societies existed.

A number of Hindu texts have portrayed homosexual experience as natural and joyful, the Kamasutra affirms and recognizes same-sex relations, and there are several Hindu temples which have carvings that depict both men and women engaging in homosexual acts. There are also numerous Hindu deities that are shown to be gender-fluid and falling into the LGBT spectrum. Same-sex relations and gender variance have been represented within Hinduism from Vedic times through to the present day, in rituals, law books, religious or narrative mythologies, commentaries, paintings, and even sculptures. (Source: [Wikipedia](#)). The Kamasutra mentions a character named Svairini, a liberated character, a woman who either lives alone or in union with another woman. The temple in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh, which was built between 950 and 1050 also portrays carvings which tell us how non-binary people were an integral part of India.

It may sound strange, but Europe which now calls itself the agent of LGBT rights was the one who criminalized Homosexuality in India. During the colonial rule, British preferred the binary and to fit into their filthy agendas they made it illegal to indulge in any act which was non binary in nature. The Article 377 came into presence in 1861 because of the hatred of the Western World towards non-binary folks, and the irony lies in the fact that these nations now portray themselves as the saviour of the World who eradicated Homophobia. Let's not even talk about Mughals, who found it difficult to *tolerate* any religion other than Islam (yes, Jazia), let alone *bear* Homosexuality.

This curse was imposed by the British not only in India, but also in 42 other colonies which includes Pakistan (former, India), Sri Lanka etc. An interesting fact is that Nepal, which was a *Hindu Rashtra* till 2008 was the first country in South Asia to recognize a third gender category in 2007 and its constitution now fully guards the rights of LGBTQ community against any form of discrimination and abuse. This fact strongly suggests that Hinduism always recognised LGBTQ community as it's integral part and nothing which was to be feared of or unholy. In fact, there are many tales in Ramayan and Mahabharat that points towards higher acceptance levels of Homosexuality in Ancient India.

We have talked about a lot and saw that how ancient and pre-modern India considered Homosexuality to be an integral part of the society. Now the question arises that 'What about the present?' as apparently the tolerance towards LGBTQ community has dwindled in *modern India* according to some sections of people. It is notable that in 2019, India's first 'Trans University' project came up in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh under the rule of the 'Saffron Party'. The Yogi Adityanath led government also amended a law in 2020 to allow transgender people to inherit ancestral land in UP and a Transgender Welfare Board was also set up which is chaired by Yogi himself. In one more such event, one entire station was declared 'Pride Station', which will be fully operated by the LGBTQ community in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. In 2016, Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India was recorded saying that "Humanity is not confined to male or female. Go and meet them, hold rallies

and meetings”, which suggests that government wants the status of the LGBTQ community to be uplifted.

RSS or the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the major body behind BJP which is considered as a Hindu radical body by the left wing has also cleared it’s stand on Homosexuality many times. Mohan Bhagwat, RSS Chief, in a conference said that “Gays and Transgenders are integral to the society”. In 2021, Transgender folk dancer, Matha B Manjamma Jogati was honored with Padma Shree by the hands of President Ramnath Kovind which removes all the question marks about the inclusion of transgender rights in modern India. Now these facts are enough to remove the allegations that ‘Saffron’ is some kind of force that undermines or dissents the LGBTQ community. In fact, they complement each other!

India is constantly marching towards full fledged integration of LGBTQ community with the modern society. And steps such as repealing colonial laws such as Article 377 goes a long way in achieving the goal. Saffron and Rainbow in India were and always will be supporting each other through thick and thin, and all the forces that tend to disturb this relationship (yes JNU, you again) will always lose ground whenever they try their antics. I would like to conclude with the line:

RESPECT EXISTENCE, OR EXPECT RESISTANCE

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